

Dunkirk Legal Support Team

Basic facts about unaccompanied minors from the refugee camp in Grande-Synthe

Dunkirk Legal Support Team is aware that in La Linière camp there are at least 188 unaccompanied minors but this number can be higher because for several reasons the team wasn't able to contact many people in the camp.

First of all there is the language barrier. Even though a lot of people speaks basic or intermediate English or German, there are many people we can't communicate with as they speak only such language as: Kurmanji, Sorani, Farsi, Dari, Pashtu, Badini, Vietnamese.

Second, there are many "invisible people" in the camp. They avoid other people because of threats from so called "travel agents". They are also people of special needs (autistic for example), disabled persons or women who face on a daily basis discrimination and fear of potential rape. Due to these reasons they stay most of the time in their shelters. On top of it there is at least few pregnant women who may be minors accompanied just by siblings or strangers but because of cultural differences we cannot verify their situation.

Third is the fact that people risk their lives every night to get in the UK. This is the reason why many people sleep during the day in order to be fit during the night. Some people may be invisible for a long time because of injuries received during trying. Legs, feet and knees injuries are a daily problem. Some people disappear in hospital for long periods of time (at least 3 examples of coma, 2 long hospitalizations). In the most drastic situations people die and we don't always get the information. The information about a 13 year-old Afghan killed by train or a few frozen bodies discovered in a freezer in the UK were received by "friends of friends".

There are many other reasons for not being able to keep track of all the unaccompanied minors, such as the movement of the people within the camp. For social, safety and other reasons people are changing shelters. That creates other kind of problems. One of those is the fact that more than 20 minors are deprived of permanent shelters. This was reported to AFEJI many times: minors sleeping in community kitchens (open places for collective cooking), on benches next to the "Tea Tent" or in the Women's Centre, and no action was taken. Minors tend to stay together, but there are many examples of minors sleeping in shelters with 3-4 stranger adults who are not their relatives nor friends.

Demography

The total population of the camp is between 900 and 1200 persons. However from time to time it may be lower or higher.

In March 2016 MSF has prepared shelters for the camp inhabitants. Since the opening of the camp many shelters haven't been repaired except for small work related to fixing plexiglass windows, locks or bolts. In the beginning of August there were about 340 shelters, now there is about 300 shelters size 2,4m x 2,0m (check the size). Recently we have witnessed that shelters have been taken away from the camp without prior information given to the people living in the camp. Because of this practice two Afghan refugees (including one minor) lost their passports and visas for Italy. Nobody from Afeji or police have contacted the victims about this.

The inhabitants of the shelters are not allocated equally. Some people can enjoy a minimum privacy because they have their own shelter (which represents no more than 20 to 25 people), but most of them have to share a shelter with 3 to 5 other people, and even though minors tend to stay together it is common practice that they have to sleep in the same shelter as one or more unrelated adult.

Most of the people living in the camp come from Kurdistan (Iraq, Iran and few of them from Turkey). Approximately not more than 15-20% come from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Vietnam. Proportions are probably similar for minors, however we are not aware exactly how many of them are in the Vietnamese minority.

Below table gives information about age structure of minors based on information the team was able to collect by 28/11/2016.

Age of minors	UAM with relatives in the UK	UAM with relatives in the UK
3	1	
10	1	
12		2
13	1	1
14	3	
15	11	4
16	41	27
17	48	48
Total for category	106	82

Data based on team resources

Children without family in the UK have only theoretical chances for going to the UK on Dubs amendment basis. New racist rule of Dubs amendment restrict chances to:

- children aged less than 13 years (4 kids),
- children coming from Syria or Sudan, (0 kids),
- children facing potential risk of being victim of trafficking or sexual abuses.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/568565/Implementation_of_section_67_of_the_Immigration_Act_2016_in_France_v2.0.pdf

In theory all minors are facing this last problem, but it is impossible to prove it as nobody is interested in doing it at the moment. There is no official authority investigating this threat.

More than half of the UK family members of the minors from the camp replied positively to our calls to become sponsor of UAM. About 20 of them have already prepared full portfolio of documentation required for starting reunification case.

Unfortunately at the moment we are facing huge problems with collecting all needed documents for the rest of the minors and for most of them we are having big deficit of lawyers who could be able to support the children during the long and difficult reunification process.

It is important to mention that 57 minors will be considered as adults within the next 5 or less month. Reaching this age they will lose their last legal chance for a reunification with family in the UK. This is said to underline that team urgently new support.

Other issues

As mentioned we are facing infrastructural issue. We have at our disposition just few pro bono lawyers including two from La Cimade who are constantly keeping a hand on the French side of process, when they simultaneously also support other people from the camp.

The other problem is to keep contact with minors. Only 103 children possesses mobile phones. More than 20 have been provided by our team and we try to crowdfund for new supply. There are not always smartphones what ban us to leave message, if they are out of credit or temporary don't have network access. The lack of possibility to call minors makes it almost impossible to be on top of the cases if a child disappears. Within the last month we reported 2 missing children.

We also receive reports about disappeared children from Calais camp. The number would be higher if we included minors who are detained by French authorities, but that we can't find in the nearby deport centres. And because a personal attendance of the minor is required for the case registration at the Prefecture, we can find ourselves unable to follow up the reunification cases or get the needed documents when a child goes missing.

State refuses to help

There is a constant lack of child protection efforts. According to the official data there are only few minors left in the camp. After the demolition of Calais only 3 children from Calais were placed in the camp. However the team still receive information about Calais children sleeping rough (referral from Paris 28/11/16). According to a statement given by eyewitnesses, minors had been refused many times at the entrance of the camp by police and security. But it is worth to mention that they have never been driven to any minor emergency accommodation when being rejected from entering the camp. Eyewitnesses confirm that police and AFEJI employees frequently make snap judgment and refuse child protection relying on an age estimation based on facial discrimination (28/10/2016), (10/11/16).

This very same judgment is done during official evaluation starting reunification cases. For example, on the same day 3 minors have been recognized as adults, even giving material proof of being 15, 16 and 17 years old.

Local police and procureur have also been caught on refusing responsibility for providing emergency accommodation. The most drastic example was to throw children out from police station by using force (15/11/2016).

La Linière
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